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Opening Statement of Rep. Todd Rokita (R-IN)
Chairman, Subcommittee on Early Childhood, Elementary, and
Secondary Education Subcommittee
Joint Hearing on "How Data Mining Threatens Students' Privacy"

Let me begin by thanking Chairman Meehan for hosting today's joint subcommittee hearing. Promoting collaboration across committees is important. As we draw from the knowledge and expertise of our House colleagues, I believe we become more effective policymakers. I look forward to hearing from our witnesses and to an informative discussion.

We are dealing with an issue today that is both critically important and exceptionally complex.

Why is it so important? As we fight for all Americans looking to build better lives for themselves and their families, we know that a quality education is at the root of that better life. With very few exceptions, a worker will not succeed in the workforce if they failed as a student in the classroom. A strong education system is essential to a strong America. That is why we should encourage innovative solutions to raise achievement and embrace new technologies that allow us to teach children in more effective ways.

We all can see how acquiring data on student performance can revolutionize student learning. For starters, data can provide an early warning to teachers, alerting them to students who are falling behind and need extra help. It can also awaken parents to the challenges their child is facing so they can step in with additional support at home. Additionally, data on student achievement can equip local communities with the information needed to hold their schools accountable, as well as enable schools to share information on what's working in their classrooms and what's not.

Why is it so complex? Well, I think we've learned by now that modern technology is anything but a simple concept. The science and ingenuity behind each new smart phone, app, computer, or piece of software is tough to comprehend, yet these products have become an integral part of our everyday lives. It's hard to imagine what life would be like if we never heard of names such as Apple, Microsoft, Google, and Amazon.

With each new technology comes risk and responsibility. That is certainly the case when it comes to the technology we bring into our schools and the data we collect on our students. Protecting student privacy is a shared responsibility.

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Parents have to be informed and engaged about what technologies and practices are used in their schools, what data is actually collected on their children, who has access to that data, and the safeguards in place to protect their child's privacy.

State and local education leaders have to ensure they are limiting the data collected to only information truly needed to improve classroom instruction. That means they must limit access to student data to only individuals who are working with the schools to improve classroom instruction. They must also ensure there are strict security protocols in place while ensuring parents are fully informed about the data use policies of the school and district.

And then there are the technology providers, who have an equally important role in protecting student privacy and securing student data to which they have access. These companies must remain vigilant and remember that students are in the classroom first and foremost to learn. Data and student information should be placed in the hands of educators so they can leverage those resources to further student achievement.

Finally, there is also a role for federal policymakers as well. We should oppose any information sharing or data mining on students intended to serve interests outside of the classroom. For forty years the *Family Educational Rights and Privacy Act* has been in place to protect the privacy of student education records. I look forward to discussing with our witnesses today whether that law is up to the challenges we face today, or whether changes need to be made so that the law reflects the realities of modern technology.

I am fighting for all people, so that they can build better lives for themselves and their families. Strengthening education is a goal we all share and one the Education and the Workforce Committee has spent a great deal of time working on. As I noted earlier, the gathering and sharing of student data can improve achievement, but it must be done in a way that puts the privacy of students first. Chairman Meehan, thank you again for hosting this important hearing.

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U.S. House Committee on Education and the Workforce